

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

December 13, 2004

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**VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH STRENGTHENS GUIDELINES FOR FISH CONSUMPTION
ADVISORIES IN STATE WATERS**

(Richmond, Va.)—The Virginia Department of Health (VDH) has revised guidelines for issuing fish consumption advisories due to contamination of fish with polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs). The changes lower the levels of PCBs required for VDH to issue a fish consumption advisory.

Eleven old advisories have been modified and 27 new advisories have been issued as a result of the changes. “The number of fish consumption advisories will increase as a result of these more stringent guidelines,” said State Health Commissioner Robert B. Stroube, M.D., M.P.H. “The levels of PCBs have not increased, but our guidelines for determining what is acceptable for human consumption have become more protective.”

The guidelines divide PCB levels into the following:

- Fish with less than 50 parts per billion (ppb) have no restrictions on consumption
- Fish with 50-500 ppb are limited to no more than two meals per month
- Fish with greater than 500 ppb should not be consumed

Women who are pregnant or may become pregnant, nursing mothers and young children should not eat any fish from the advisory areas.

Historically, Virginia has steadily lowered the levels of PCBs considered acceptable in fish. Prior to 1980, Virginia followed guidelines developed by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) that considered PCB levels higher than 5,000 ppb in exceedance of safety guidelines. In 1984, the FDA reduced the level to 2,000 ppb. In 1998, VDH developed its own fish consumption advisory guidelines and set its levels of concern for PCBs in fish to no more than 600 ppb. The new guidelines announced today further reduce that level to 50 ppb.

The levels of concern for PCBs are calculated in part based on how long an individual may consume fish from the same water source. Previously those calculations were based on the assumption that an individual may consume fish, at most, between 9 to 12 years from the same source. The new guidelines take into consideration the possibility that an individual may consume fish for as many as 30 years from the same location.

Both Maryland and North Carolina have made similar adjustments in recent years. Virginia shares water bodies with both states and the new guidelines provide more consistent advice to regional fishers.

An interactive online map detailing the complete list of fish consumption advisories is available on the Virginia Department of Health Web site at www.vdh.virginia.gov/HHControl/fishingadvisories.asp. A fact sheet with answers to frequently asked questions on fish consumption advisories is available at www.vdh.virginia.gov/HHControl/advisoriesq&a.pdf.

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